

THE PITTED SHELLED TURTLE *CARETTOCHELYS INSCULPTA* IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

by K.V. Dupe

This unique reptile lives in fresh as well as estuarine waters. Its limbs are like the flippers of marine turtles but have short claws on the anterior edges. It uses the front flippers in the same way as marine turtles when on land; i.e., instead of walking as do freshwater tortoises, it levers itself forward in short lunges. Also like the marine turtles, it withdraws the head directly beneath the carapace without turning its neck to the side.

One conspicuous feature of this turtle is the pig-like snout, which may be an adaptation for locating food in the muddy bed of its habitat.

The carapace of this turtle is high domed and the largest specimen measured 75 cm in length. Females lay spherical eggs similar to those of sea turtles. The eggs measure approximately 32 mm in diameter, and as many as 22 have been found in a nest.

Mr M. Lawson collected the first Australian record of this turtle from the Daly River, Northern Territory in 1969. He sent a photograph to the Australian Museum in Sydney, and from the photograph it was identified by H.G. Cogger, curator of reptiles and amphibians, as the Pitted Shelled Turtle.

Previously it had been reported only from New Guinea.

The Pitted Shell Turtle is clearly depicted in aboriginal rock art in the Kakadu National Park.



Aboriginal rock painting of Pitted-shelled Turtle *Carettochelys insculpta*, Nourlangie Rock, Kakadu National Park - Photo Stephen Swanson